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Missed an edition? Current and back issues of the *Messenger* are available online at [covdio.org/messenger](http://covdio.org/messenger).



(top) The Franciscan Daughters of Mary, Sisters of St. Joseph the Worker and Carmelite Sisters at the Mass for the World Day of Consecrated Life, Feb. 1.  
 (center) Benedictine Sisters, Divine Providence Sisters and Notre Dame Sisters pray together at the Mass for Consecrated Life.  
 (bottom) Franciscan Daughters of Mary help a friend follow along in the program.



## Bishop Iffert thanks consecrated persons for witness, faithfulness, trust and most especially joy

**Bella Bailey**  
*Multimedia Correspondent*

Religious brothers and sisters throughout the Diocese of Covington gathered in celebration, Feb. 1, with Mass and breakfast for the World Day of Consecrated Life. Bishop John Iffert was the celebrant with Deacon Eric Ritchie assisting at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington.

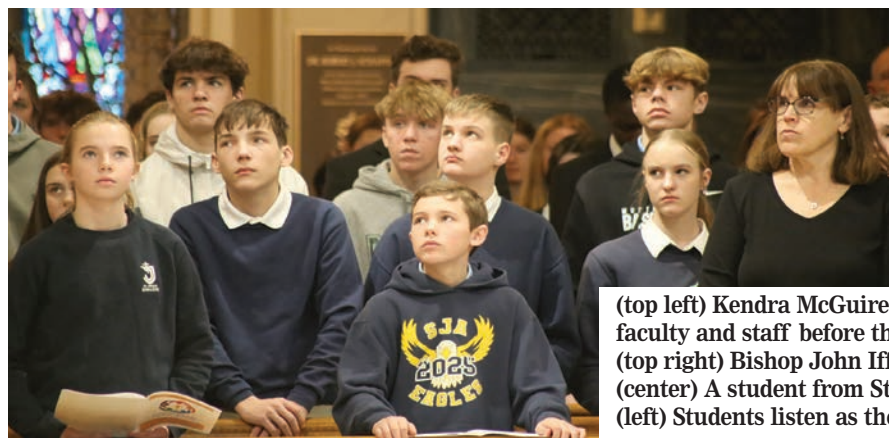
The gospel reading, Mark 4:35-41, is well known; the apostles awaken Jesus, who is asleep in the stern of a boat, to quell the stormy seas, allowing for the safe passage of the apostles and himself. Mark writes of this event, but Mark was not there to witness it, rather, he receives the story from the apostle Peter. Bishop Iffert

says in his homily, "Mark of course is considered by many to be a disciple of Peter; who accompanied Peter for years as a secretary and coworker. The Gospel is included among apostolic writings because it is believed that Mark received the teaching from Peter and that he remembered it well."

"Remember," Bishop Iffert continued, "it was a difficult thing to be a Christian in the times when Mark wrote. It was a challenging reality to be a Christian. If you were a Jewish Christian, you were likely alienated from family, from profession, from the honor that attaches to family. You were likely alienated from synagogue, from community."

*(Continued on page 4)*

# Catholic Education sows the seeds of God's word



**Bella Bailey**  
Multimedia Correspondent

Catholic Schools Week is a long-standing tradition and national celebration of Catholic education. As a student, it means pajama days and pizza parties, as a teacher it means small tokens of appreciation. The highlight of the week is the annual Catholic Schools Week Mass, where students, faculty and staff from all Catholic schools in the Diocese gather and celebrate Catholic education with Bishop John Iffert and the Catholic Schools Office. From St. Patrick High School in Maysville, to Prince of Peace School in Covington, there were representatives from each school in attendance at the January 29

Mass.

In opening remarks from Kendra McGuire, superintendent of Schools, she said, "That is why we are here, to celebrate Catholic Schools Week as the same faith community. This is one week that we pause each year to appreciate the education where Jesus is the focus. A time to where we thank our parents, for sacrificing to send us to Catholic schools. To the principals and teachers, who work so hard to educate us. The volunteers, who give so much of their time, their talents and their treasures to ensure that we can walk with more and more students to learn about Jesus each day. To our priests, who walk with us each day inviting us to grow in our relationship with Jesus, especially in the sacraments."

In his homily, Bishop Iffert recalled a story which took place over many decades. As a child he attended a summer camp, at this camp they took a hike to Packentuck waterfall. Bishop Iffert said that the hike to the waterfall was relatively



easy the first time he went as there was a paved path. Upon his return year after year however, the pavement started to crack, roots begin to poke out of the pavement, and vegetation from the surrounding woods begin to encroach. Before long, Bishop Iffert said, the path was unrecognizable, life had grown and blossomed in a place where it was seemingly impossible.

"Those little cracks in the pavement, seed fell down there and lived and died and lived and died and broke open those little cracks and ford first sediment, then sand, then soil ... 40 years after my first visit, you can't recognize there was ever a road there, the forest has reclaimed it," Bishop Iffert said. The seed of the word of God can work in you, Bishop Iffert said, the same way that the seeds of the forest worked in the paved path to Packentuck.

"You are more than a couple of trillion cells and an electric charge finding your way through the world. Instead, you are that noble, loving, heroic person you sense yourself to be ... Catholic Education exposes you first of all to the faith, of God, so that you know your life is more than just a bunch of cells and an electric charge, that you are an eternal spirit, you are an eternal spirit enfolded in this magnificent creative body. Being that creature of flesh and spirit, God has made you to sense his ways in the world and respond to them and to become that noble person you know yourself to be and are capable of becoming," Bishop Iffert said.

Catholic education, which is celebrated Catholic Schools Week, instills and sows the seeds of God's word into the hearts and minds of students, so that in 40 years, when they look back, they will see God's work in their life.

(top left) Kendra McGuire, superintendent of Schools, addresses the students, faculty and staff before the start of Mass.

(top right) Bishop John Iffert gestures during his homily.

(center) A student from St. Henry Elementary School prays reverently before Mass.

(left) Students listen as the Gospel is proclaimed.

# Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption updates digital tour, with North window in high def

**Maura Baker**  
Staff Writer

In 2010, Msgr. William Neuhaus, at time the rector of the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, published a 360-degree digital tour of the cathedral using panoramic photography. Now, more than 10 years later, the digital tour has been updated with new imagery of Covington's iconic cathedral.

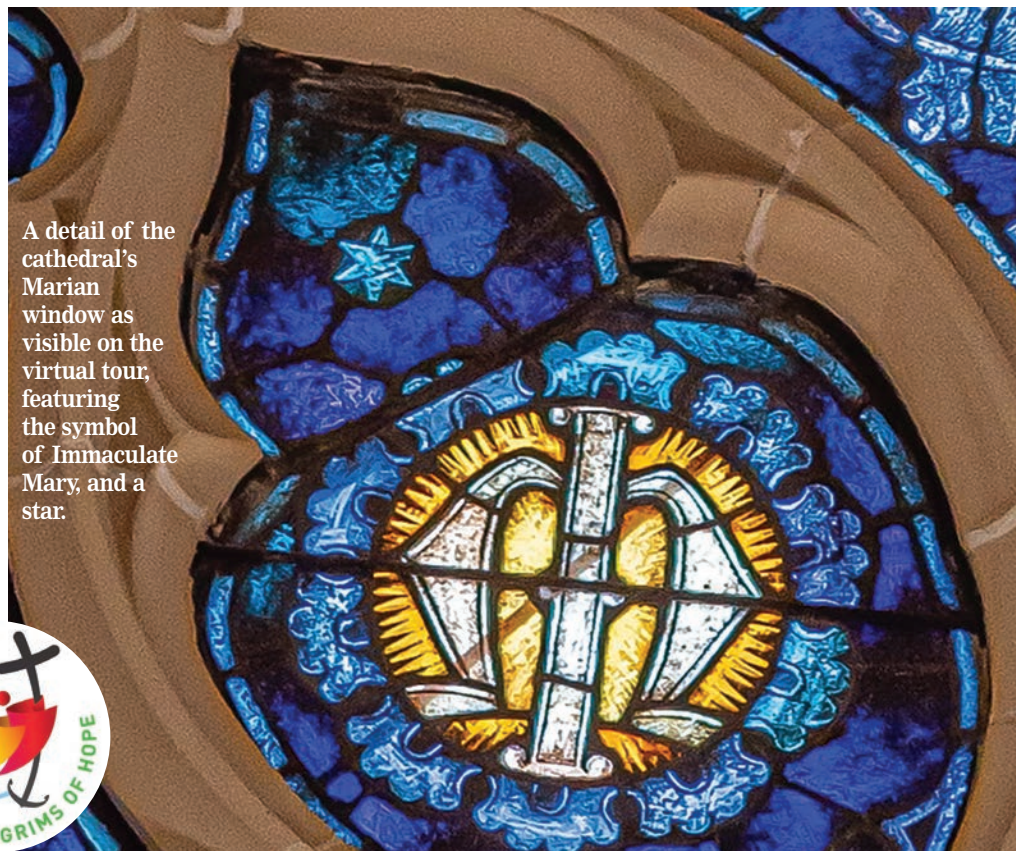
"I decided that with some of the recent enhancements and additions over the last 10 years that we re-conducted that tour," said Father Ryan Maher, the cathedral's present rector.

Father Maher said that part of the parish's pastoral plan priorities is to "continue to be a welcoming community," and the up-to-date tour serves as a "kind of way to welcome people virtually to the cathedral."

The new tour was put together by Ron Rack Photography, out of Cincinnati, and features beautifully detailed and colorful photos of the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption and many of its windows, artwork and features. Various buttons allow for easy navigation and allows visitors to see details they would otherwise not be able to view in person. Notably, the tour features a large-scale, high-definition image of the Cathedral's North window that can be zoomed in upon.

The release of the updated tour also coincides timely with the jubilee, offering a pilgrimage option to the sick, incarcerated and those who otherwise cannot visit the pilgrimage site in person. For the purpose of obtaining indulgences, according to the *Decree on the Granting of Indulgence during the*

(Continued on page 6)



A detail of the cathedral's Marian window as visible on the virtual tour, featuring the symbol of Immaculate Mary, and a star.



# Project Rachel — walking with post-abortive women on the road to forgiveness

Laura Keener  
Editor

Announced in June 2024 by Bishop John Iffert, the Diocese of Covington, as part of its pastoral plan, has embarked on a three-year Campaign of Mercy. In year one, parishioners are asked to identify and make a corporal or spiritual work of mercy their own, incorporating that work of mercy into their life through service to others. In year two, the work of evangelization begins by inviting another Catholic person who is not active in the life of the Church to join in that work of mercy. Finally, in year three, the ask to join in that service work is extended to someone who is unchurched, eventually with an invitation to praying together.



In support of the Campaign of Mercy, each month the *Messenger* has been highlighting a corporal or spiritual work of mercy and ways to connect to that work through service with either a diocesan or local social service organization, a parish group or as an individual. This month the highlighted work of mercy is bearing wrongs patiently.

Bearing wrongs patiently is not an acceptance of injustice or hurts, but a realization that change is slow and requires prayer and persistence. It is also an invitation to healing and forgiveness, two other processes that require time. Project Rachel, a ministry of the Diocese of Covington, welcomes women who have had an abortion to experience God's healing mercy and forgiveness.

After decades of carrying the guilt of an abortion, one woman began the process of reconciliation and healing as she was preparing to enter the Church through RCIA. After entering the Church, she learned of Project Rachel from a witness talk during Christ Renews His Parish.

That witness, "was my catalyst to make the call," she



said about finding the courage to join a Project Rachel series. Due to the sensitive nature of abortion and out respect for the confidentiality of the Project Rachel program, the *Messenger* agreed not to identify the woman who was interviewed for this article.

Project Rachel is a confidential, 8-session program for women

of all, or no, faiths. Project Rachel is a listening and sharing ministry consisting of two leaders — one woman who has had an abortion and one woman who has not — and just a few new participants. To facilitate the process of healing, women are encouraged to share their story, but no

(Continued on page 4)

# Mental Health First Aid training is beneficial to all, says CIT trained officer

Maura Baker  
Staff Writer

Statistics from the National Institute of Mental Health indicate that one in five U.S. adults live with mental illness. A growing and present phenomena, the concept of mental health first aid (MHFA) was developed to extend the concept of first aid training to mental health and substance

use challenges. MHFA teaches participants to recognize signs and symptoms, how to listen nonjudgmentally and give reassurance and offer appropriate support to those in need.

A training for MHFA will be offered by Catholic Charities, Diocese of Covington, Feb. 18. A thorough, day-long training, interested parties are urged to register soon to make time for preparatory coursework — although, according to CIT trained police officer and speaker Autumn Ruehl, having the skills learned through MHFA training is "beneficial to all."

CIT training denotes an officer who has a "designation of being able to respond to people that might be in a mental health crisis," said Ms. Ruehl. "We train a lot in law enforcement on those kind of responses, because that is a majority of our calls."

Also pursuing a masters in social work, Ms. Ruehl was asked to become an instructor in MHFA, and started teaching the class initially on NKU's campus in 2020 — a

(Continued on page 12)

**Catholic Charities**  
**Diocese of Covington**  
**Mental Health First Aid training**

**February 18**  
Catholic Charities, Diocese of Covington, Covington  
**9 a.m.–3:30 p.m.**  
Registration required online at <https://form.jotform.com/243105347336149>.  
Mental Health First Aid helps reduce stigma, teach signs and symptoms and prepare first aiders to use a 5-step action plan to use in the event of a mental health crisis.

**Wm. T. (Bill) Robinson III**  
**Institute for Religious Liberty**  
to host **George Weigel**,

**George Weigel**

Catholic theologian and one of America's leading public intellectuals, for a talk on, "Pope St. John Paul II and Religious Liberty." **The event is free to the public and will take place on Feb. 12, 7–9:30 p.m.** in the Ziegler Auditorium in the new Academic Center on the Thomas More University Campus, Crestview Hills.

**Bishop's Schedule**



## The second annual Kentucky March for Life

Feb. 12, Frankfort, Ky.

Mass at Good Shepherd Church, Frankfort, begins at 9:30 a.m.

Gathering at the capitol at 11:30 a.m.

Transportation to the March for Life from the Diocese of Covington via buses will be free of cost, although space is limited. Interested parties contact the diocesan Pro-Life Office at (859) 392-1545 for information.

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|---|---|
| <p><b>Feb. 8</b><br/>Pastoral Council meeting, 10 a.m.<br/>Mass, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, 4:30 p.m.</p> <p><b>Feb. 11</b><br/>Priest Formation Day, St. Barbara Parish, Erlanger, 1p.m.<br/>Sacrament of Confirmation, St. Timothy Parish, Union, 7 p.m.</p> <p><b>Feb. 12</b><br/>March For Life, Frankfort, Ky.<br/>DPAA solicitor's luncheon, Metropolitan Club, Covington, noon<br/>Sacrament of Confirmation, All Saints Parish, Walton, 7 p.m.</p> | <p><b>Feb. 13</b><br/>Sacrament of Confirmation, St. Patrick Parish, Maysville, 7 p.m.</p> <p><b>Feb.16</b><br/>Mass, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, 7:30 a.m.</p> <p><b>Feb. 17</b><br/>Curia offices closed in observance of the Presidents Day holiday</p> |
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# Consecrated life

(Continued from page 1)

Mark was writing during the dawn of a new institution, Bishop Iffert said, the institution of the Catholic church. “This little community in Rome that had been considered an outcast was beginning to grow as a result of the witness of those martyrs and beginning to realize that they could not go on to think of themselves as a sect of Judaism, but that they were becoming something new.”

“In that sense,” Bishop Iffert said, “I believe the ... vocation of Mark writing his Gospel, is very much like the

vocation of consecrated people in this world. There are lots of folks who do not understand consecrated life. There are lots of folks who do not understand how we can make the decisions that we make, how we can make the sacrifices that we make.”

Making the devotion to consecrated life in today’s world can be difficult, Bishop Iffert said, it is not like the consecrated life of generations before. “You are consecrated religious at a time too late to be laid to rest by those armies of young, consecrated men and women coming behind you. You are consecrated religious at a time when you are selling off your mother house, at a time when you are embrac-

ing the language of right sizing, at time when you are struggling to figure out who is going to lead the institutions you have created and bring them into the future.”

Much like Mark, unsure who will take the helm of their new institution, being a member of consecrated life at a time where the numbers are shrinking rather than growing, lends to a feeling of unsureness. But, Bishop Iffert said, there is an assurance, “I know your life is filled with sacrifices to the Lord, but it is a joy to join Jesus on his cross. It is a joy to live in the assurance of God, it is a joy to let that promise direct everything in our lives.”

“Thank you,” Bishop Iffert said, “for your witness, and

# Project Rachel

(Continued from page 3)

one is coerced to share or do anything that makes them uncomfortable. The program is offered through the Diocese’s Pro-Life Office at no cost to participants.

“It’s extremely difficult to make the call,” she said. “Statistically, women will have many touches before they’re ready or are able to talk about their abortion with someone else. If someone is sharing that experience with you, it’s so important to be empathetic and to listen to them and to encourage them. We know of Jesus’s promise to us that we’re forgiven, but oftentimes it’s them forgiving themselves that’s impossible,” she said.

In addition to being a mentor for Project Rachel, the woman interviewed also works at a local pregnancy care center helping vulnerable or abortion-minded women to take the time to recover from the shock of learning of an intended pregnancy and encouraging them to choose life for their baby. According to statistics provided by the Guttmacher Institute, one in four women will have an abortion during their lifetime. Also, from the Guttmacher Institute, in 2020, 42 percent of abortion patients reported having a prior abortion. For these women coming into the pregnancy care center, she shares the healing she experi-

enced through Project Rachel.

“I spoke to a woman today, her priest gave her the card with the number for Project Rachel and encouraged her to try to make that call,” she said. “For her, that was a step toward her being able to forgive herself; she’s willing to try. She’s suffering in that violence of abortion, but she is wanting healing. She’s willing to walk that walk with someone else, through the Church, through the healing power of Christ and with the Holy Spirit to get there.”

Abortion, she said, is the sin that never seems to go away. Reminders are everywhere — in the crosses of the Cemetery of the Innocents displayed at parishes, during homilies, at political marches and during political campaigns, in discussions at small prayer groups and sometimes among family members. What’s important to remember, she said, is that when talking about abortion, to be aware that at least one woman in the room has probably had an abortion and that it is of the greatest importance for her to hear that healing and forgiveness is available through the Church. If your conversation leads a woman to disclose her abortion to you, don’t be afraid of that conversation. And don’t be afraid to revisit the conversation later, discreetly of course.

“Be open to being able to have that conversation. Love the person in front of you as Jesus would, hear her story

and be able to help get her to a place where she’s willing to seek healing. Help her, help guide her to that, it’s so important,” she said. “The Church has that healing and forgiveness and it’s readily available. Just make sure that those touches are out there.”

While she admits that the journey to healing is long, with many stops and starts along the way, bearing that hurt patiently doesn’t mean putting off seeking forgiveness or from encouraging someone to seek forgiveness.

“If someone has a person in their life that’s come to them or shared their story, don’t be afraid to talk with them. Don’t be afraid to bring it back up again,” she said. “It might cause tears, and you might be afraid of the pain. Don’t be. Don’t be afraid to check in with them and see where they are. Oftentimes they’re not going to make that call the first time, so don’t be afraid to follow up and check back in with them. Pray with them about making the decision to make the call and step into healing.”

*When a private choice becomes a secret burden, reach out for help and healing after an abortion. Call the Project Rachel confidential phone number at (859) 392-1547.*

*For more information on the Campaign of Mercy visit [www.covdio.org/mercy](http://www.covdio.org/mercy)*



# Senior Resource Center

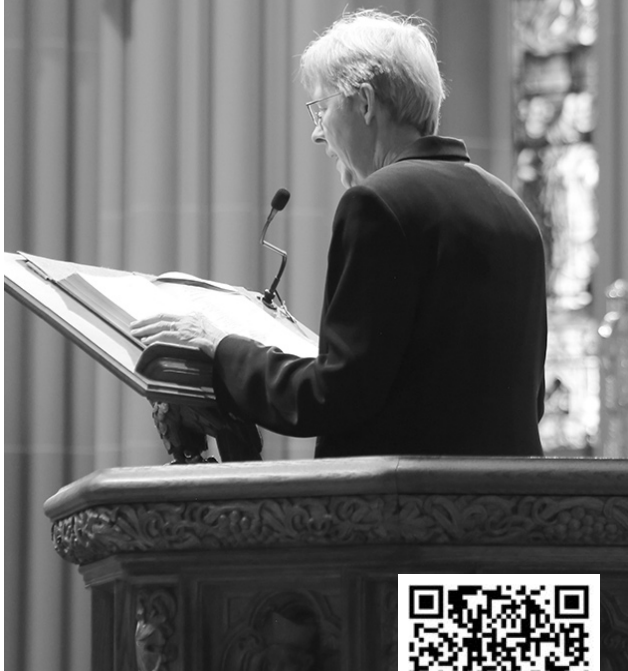
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**Bishop Iffert gathered for Mass with the religious brothers and sisters in the Diocese of Covington in celebration of World Day of Consecrated Life on February 1. To hear a part of his homily and see the sisters and other religious that attended, scan the QR Code!**

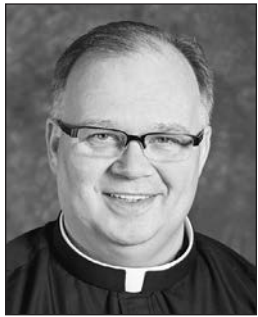
<p>VOL. 95 <b>MESSENGER</b> No. 5</p> <p>Official newspaper of the Diocese of Covington</p> <p>Cathedral Square • 1125 Madison Ave. • Covington, Ky. 41011-3115 Telephone: (859) 392-1500 E-mail: <a href="mailto:messenger@covdio.org">messenger@covdio.org</a> <a href="http://www.covdio.org">www.covdio.org</a></p>	<p>(UPS-403-650) Published by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Covington, Ky.; 44 issues a year (weekly except from June 1 to mid-August, when published every other week; not published the week after Easter and two weeks at Christmas/New Year's). Subscription rate: \$19 per year; \$40 foreign. Periodical Postage paid at Covington, KY 41012 and additional mailing office Cincinnati, Ohio 45203. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to MESSENGER, 1125 Madison Ave., Covington, KY 41011-3115.</p> <p><b>Advertising deadline:</b> Wednesday noon, 9 days prior to publication date. <b>Editorial deadline:</b> Friday noon, 7 days prior to date. <b>Subscriptions, address changes:</b> Contact Circulation Dept. at above address.</p>	<p>Bishop John C. Iffert ..... Publisher Laura Keener ..... Editor, General Manager Laura Gillespie ..... Production Coordinator/Designer Maura Baker ..... Staff Writer Isabella (Bella) Bailey ..... Multimedia Correspondent David Stutler ..... Sales Manager</p>
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# Getting out of a slump

The readings for the Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time — Cycle C — are: Isaiah 6:1-2a,3-8; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; and Luke 5:1-11.

We have all experienced slumps in our life. It could be things aren't working out so well at work. We get into a slump, we feel like we have hit bottom, and all there is left to do is to look up and climb out of the slump. We hear of athletes hitting a slump, not playing like they normally would. It may be something like reading a book and you fall asleep every time you pick up the book. You still want to read the book but being in a slump keeps you from reading the book.

## GO AND GLORIFY



Father Gregory Bach

The disciples were in the boat with Jesus when he taught the crowds. After teaching he told them to put out into the deep and lower your nets. The disciples were in a slump, not catching fish all day. At the command of Jesus, they lowered their nets and brought enough fish filling two boats. What an incredible sign to the disciples and others who may have gathered. The Gospel speaks of the nets almost tearing and boats overflowing.

The disciples were to learn a few good lessons. The first lesson is that God can do anything. He pulled them out of their fishing slump by allowing fish to overtake the nets and boats. With God all things are possible.

Secondly, the disciples see the tremendous blessing that only God can give by allowing so great a gift to come into their lives. The other point is to look and see that the lives of the disciples may have been in a slump. Maybe their trade of fishing was not producing what they needed. When Jesus filled the boat, their hearts were overflowing with love for Jesus who had blessed them. After all these things have taken place, they left everything and followed Jesus.

When we get in a slump do we allow the gift of grace to pull us out? Are we able to see that God can do anything? Are we able to look at the tremendous ways in which Jesus has blessed us? Are we able to see that the love of Christ overflows in our hearts?

During this coming week may we look and find Jesus Christ who can do all things and who blesses us in a special way as to receive his bountiful glorious love.

*Father Gregory Bach is assistant to the Bishop and vice-chancellor, Diocese of Covington, Ky*

### Reporting Misconduct in the Diocese of Covington

Anyone who has experienced sexual misconduct by a cleric, employee or volunteer of the Diocese of Covington is asked to contact Ms. Julie Feinauer, diocesan victims assistance coordinator (859) 392-1515. Professional assistance and pastoral support will be provided in confidentiality and with respect.

A copy of the "Diocesan Policies and Procedures for Addressing Sexual Misconduct" is available by contacting the Chancery, (859) 392-1510 or visiting [www.covdio.org](http://www.covdio.org) and going to "Sexual Misconduct Policy."

### Informando sobre conducta inapropiada en la Diócesis de Covington

Cualquier persona que haya experimentado conducta sexual inapropiada por parte de un clérigo, empleado o voluntario de la Diócesis de Covington está invitada a ponerse en contacto con Ms. Julie Feinauer, coordinadora diocesana para dar asistencia a las víctimas. Teléfono (859) 392-1515. Asistencia profesional y apoyo moral serán ofrecidos de una manera confidencial y con respeto.

Una copia de "Normas y Procedimientos sobre Conducta Sexual Inapropiada" está disponible poniéndose en contacto con la Cancillería, Teléfono (859) 392-1510, o visitando [www.covdio.org](http://www.covdio.org) y marcando "Sexual Misconduct Policy."

# Joy in all things

As the last of the great snowfall of 2025 melts away, I am sure many of us are taking a sigh of relief. For most adults, snow is nice for the first day or two, but then life must go on and the piles of snow on our cars and in the parking lots have become a nuisance and a hazard.

For our children, however, the snow rarely seems to lose its charm. For my toddlers, the snow that remains still insists an excited gasp and a joyful "look at all the snow!"

And while we often credit this excitement to childishness, I have come to think of it as God's reminder to find joy in all things.

Children possess the blessing of living completely in the moment. Their focus is completely on what is happening around them with little to no thought of what will be happening in the next hour, nevertheless the next few weeks or months. As a wife and mother of 2.5 little girls, I understand and appreciate the importance of looking ahead and having a plan. Ballet recitals, swim lessons, birthdays, Mommy and Daddy's work schedule, family holidays — there is always somewhere else we want/need to be. Without a plan it will not get done and most things will be forgotten.

Schedules and calendars are important. Being prepared for the future is wise and resourceful, but I have also seen that living too much in the future can be a detriment to a person's joy. Living everyday in the world of "what if" can lead to unbearable stress and anxiety, taking the joy out of everyday life.

## VIEWPOINT



Sarah Torres

Children possess the blessing of living completely in the moment. Their focus is completely on what is happening around them with little to no thought of what will be happening in the next hour, nevertheless the next few weeks or months. As a wife and mother of 2.5 little girls, I understand and appreciate the importance of looking ahead and having a plan. Ballet recitals, swim lessons, birthdays, Mommy and Daddy's work schedule, family holidays — there is always somewhere else we want/need to be. Without a plan it will not get done and most things will be forgotten.

Schedules and calendars are important. Being prepared for the future is wise and resourceful, but I have also seen that living too much in the future can be a detriment to a person's joy. Living everyday in the world of "what if" can lead to unbearable stress and anxiety, taking the joy out of everyday life.

# God's plan

way is part of God's plan.

My wife is good at also pointing out to me another truth, that, when interruptions happen, unbeknownst to us, it might be a saving grace and an act of providential protection that only God knows. I believe God sends angels to work out his plan and we might be ordained as such from time to time, even if we do not know it or deserve the title.

This is true even outside the family, with job duties and routine errands. Can we learn to embrace these interruptions and do our part?

Being open to God's plan can be profound and something we might never fully see this side of heaven. Kind words spoken, courteous gestures offered, truth of the Gospel shared might be all we have to do in unique opportunities of encounter orchestrated by God. Maybe it is even bigger though! Choosing a certain vocation, making a more time-committed impact on another such as ministering to a needy population, or mentoring a youth, fostering or adopting a child.

It is humbling to think of the 176 children who over my career at DCCCH Center for Children and Families were adopted; I pray it has been a positive outcome filled with hope. The hundreds of other children cared for in foster homes either found a relative, returned home or were just a short stop in their journey with us. Staying connected with many of these children, I am blessed to see the plan God is unfolding.

I pray we as a Church can accept God's plan, become an active part of it to help care for others in whatever form that may take. It is a year of hope indeed with eternal consequences.

Contact DCCCH Center for Children and Families at (859) 331-2040 or [www.dccchcenter.org](http://www.dccchcenter.org) for more information about serving abused and neglected youth.

*Ronald M. Bertsch is director of Therapeutic Foster Care/Adoption for the DCCCH Center for Children and Families, Ft. Mitchell.*

## VIEWPOINT



Ronald M. Bertsch

No doubt we all have had experiences of frustration. Whether it be in the moment or some future activity when unexpected forces changed our plans. If you are like me, I do not like disruptions to MY plans and may react with indignation and disappointment.

I just finished reading a book, "The Way of the Father," written by Michael W. Smith. He is the award-winning Christian music artist, songwriter and performer. After his earthly father passed away, he wrote a reflection about the life lessons he learned from his dad and more profoundly what Abba Father in Heaven gives us.

Michael shared a couple of scenarios of change and interruption to plans during his lifetime. One was a forced missed flight to Africa to perform one of his concerts. By now he understood God had a different plan. In looking for it, Michael feels the Uber driver that transported him was the soul put in his path. It was the opportunity to share a bit of his story and the Gospel at just the right time this Uber driver needed it.

Bottom line he learned to embrace interruptions. Looking for what God must have in motion if he would just do his part. This struck me and is such a beautiful healthy way to cope with unexpected interruptions. I think it goes beyond just coping and can be an opportunity to play an even bigger role in God's plan.

As a parent of five children, four through adoption and now all grown up, I have come to realize that interruption and change are inevitable. I pray that my accepting a role in being dad to my children and learning to accept all the interruptions that came, and still come, my

## Cathedral updates digital tour

(Continued from page 2)

Ordinary Jubilee Year 2025 called by His Holiness Pope Francis, 13.05.2024, “The faithful who are truly repentant of sin but who cannot participate in the various solemn celebrations, pilgrimages and pious visits for serious reasons (especially cloistered nuns and monks, but also the elderly, the sick, prisoners, and those who, through their work in hospitals or other care facilities, provide continuous service to the sick), can obtain the Jubilee Indulgence, under the same conditions if, united in spirit with the faithful taking part in person.” Digital spaces can serve as ways to help facilitate this relationship for those who cannot visit in person, with full information on obtaining an indulgence available online at [www.usccb.org/jubilee2025](http://www.usccb.org/jubilee2025) or at <https://covidio.org/jubilee/>.



A screenshot from the new digital tour of the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington — available now online at <https://covcathedral.com>.

## Five things to know about the sacrament of reconciliation

OSV News

Looking around at the evil and suffering we encounter on our screens, in our communities, in our families and even staring back at us in the mirror, it can be difficult to believe that Christ came 2,000 years ago to heal our world.

We sure don't look redeemed.

The tension between sin and reconciliation, though, is at the heart of the mission of the Catholic Church. Christ told his apostles to teach “repentance and forgiveness of sins,” and he empowered them to be ministers of God's mercy. It is carried on today in the sacrament of reconciliation.

Here are five things you might not know, others you once learned but perhaps forgot, and inspiration to recommit daily to seeking closer friendship with God through repentance and fighting sin, wherever it is found.

1. Jesus instituted the sacrament of penance when he appeared to the apostles on Easter Sunday night. In the Gospel of John, Jesus breathes on the apostles and tells them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained” (20:22-23).

2. The sacrament of penance looked a lot different in the early church. In St. Paul's writings (for example, 1 Cor 5:3-5; 2 Cor 2:7-11), we see the apostles' role in placing sinners

under bans of excommunication and then reconciling them. It also seems there was an initial custom of public confession of sins, but that seems to have ended early on. By the fifth century, church leaders actively discouraged the practice.

In some regions, it was common for people guilty of serious sins (like apostasy, adultery or murder) to be enrolled as “public penitents,” meaning they dressed in sackcloth and ashes and performed prescribed penances and almsgiving. They then would be reconciled publicly with the church on the Thursday before Easter.

3. We owe it to Irish monks for several innovations that led to the practice of the sacrament of penance as we recognize it today. They formalized the practice of confession of sins made privately to a priest, and under a seal of secrecy, and absolution was granted before penance, usually also private, was performed. This Celtic practice of immediate absolution became very popular and was spread throughout Europe through the Irish monks' missionary endeavors.

4. During the Middle Ages, theologians all recognized penance as a sacrament of the church, but disagreed on fine points like whether forgiveness came about through the grace of the person's sorrow, or through the grace of the priest's absolution. St. Thomas Aquinas, using scholastic

terms, defined the “matter” of the sacrament as the penitent's sorrow, and the

“form” as the priest's absolution.

The second Council of Lyons, France, in 1274 formally defined penance as a sacrament.

But it was the Council of Trent, Italy, in the mid-16th century that really made extensive clarifications to the sacrament. It devoted some nine chapters and 15 canons on sin and penance. The Second Vatican Council also dwelled on the sacrament, emphasizing its healing nature.

5. Why do we use both “reconciliation” and “penance” to describe the sacrament? Reconciliation and penance are two different aspects of the sacrament. Reconciliation refers primarily to the process by which someone who is in serious sin returns to the full communion of the church through confession and absolution.

Penance refers to the process by which someone who is guilty of lesser sins and who has not broken communion with the church through mortal sin continues his or her life in the church by spiritual growth and conversion via sacramental confession.

This distinction between reconciliation and penance also serves to orient people as they prepare for the sacrament. (The Catechism also refers to it as the “sacrament of forgiveness” and the “sacrament of conversion.”)

PEOPLE AND EVENTS

**The weekly TV Mass from the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption is broadcast locally** on The CW, Sundays, 10—11 a.m. Viewers can tune-in on the following channels: antenna 12.2; Spectrum 117 or 25; Cincinnati Bell 17 or 517; and DirectTV 25.

**Fish fries, festivals, prayer services, etc. Parishes, schools and Catholic organizations of the Diocese of Covington can now have their event featured on the Diocesan online calendar.** Submit your event at <https://covdio.org/calendar/>.

The Death and Resurrection of Jesus is central to the Christian faith. **In this series of talks, Father Michael Comer takes us deeper into the mystery of Jesus' Passion, from Gethsemani to Jesus' crucifixion and death, by exploring the "Passion Narratives."** In the "Resurrection Narratives" Father Comer will take us from the tomb to Jesus' victory over death and the promise of eternal life. Free and open to all. Come and bring a friend. All talks are held at Mother of God Church, Covington, 10:30 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. on the following dates: Passion Narratives, Feb. 6, 13 and 20. Resurrection Narratives, March 6, 13, 27, April 3 and 10. If you missed Father Comer's talks on the Infancy Narratives find them at [mother-of-god.org](http://mother-of-god.org) under Father Mike's Talks.

**"Building the Mentoring Relationship: Empathic Listening Workshop,"** Part 1, Feb. 8, 9—11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium. Empathic listening is the skill that enables mentors to truly understand another person intellectually as well as emotionally. Part II will be held Feb. 22. For information contact Isaak at the Office of Catechesis and Evangelization, (859) 392-1529.

**"The Biggest Unanswered Questions in Astronomy"** with Dr. Wes Ryle, Cincinnati Observatory astronomer, Feb. 8, 6:30—8:30 p.m., Steigerwald Hall/Thomas More University Observatory. We are awash in information and facts about the cosmos, but there is still much we don't know. Former Thomas More Professor, Wes Ryle, returns to address some of the biggest remaining questions in astronomy, including dark matter, dark energy and whether there is more out there than our universe. Free. No RSVP needed.

**The 2025 Kentucky March for Life will be held Feb. 12.** The theme for this year's march is "Together for Life: Walking in Hope, Inspiring Change, Saving Lives." Experience a day of prayer, music, witness and unity at Kentucky's Capital. The Diocese has reserved two charter buses to travel to Frankfort for the March. Contact the Pro-Life Office to reserve a seat at (859) 392-1546.

**Wm. T. (Bill) Robinson III Institute for Religious Liberty to host George Weigel,** Catholic theologian and one of America's leading public intellectuals, for a talk on, "Pope St. John Paul II and Religious Liberty," Feb. 12, 7-9:30 p.m., Ziegler Auditorium in the new Academic Center on the Thomas More University Campus, Crestview Hills. The event is free to the public.

**Newport Central Catholic High School announces its 24th class of inductees into its Athletic Hall of Fame:** Tony Bacigalupo, '00; Dr. Grady Gibson, '72; Greg Ladenburger, '67 (posthumously); Drew McDonald, '15; Kristen Schreiber Fayne, '15; and Kaitlin Smith Marks, '08. Also being honored as the "Team of Distinction" is the 2010 Football Class 2A State Champion Team. Additionally, Dan Wagner, '78, will receive Coach Jim Connor Award and Dr. Richard Schuck will receive the Fr. John Hegenauer Community Service Award. The induction and award ceremonies is Feb. 15, Newport Central Catholic gymnasium, social hour, 6 p.m.; dinner and ceremony at 7 p.m. Cost \$30. For information call (859) 292-0001.

**Morning of reflection — Lectio Divina, with Father Conor Kunath,** Feb. 15, 9 a.m.—noon, Sts. Boniface and James Parish, Ludlow.

In 2021, 12.7 million adults thought of, planned or attempted suicide. **Mental Health First Aid helps reduce stigma, teach signs and symptoms and prepare first aiders to use a 5-step action plan to use in the event**

**of a mental health crisis.** Autumn Ruehl will present Mental Health First Aid, Feb. 18, 9 a.m.-3:30 p.m., Catholic Charities, 3629 Church St., Covington. Register at <https://form.jotform.com/243105347336149>.

**The Eva G. Farris Gallery at Thomas More University invites the public to an "Exhibit of Handmade Books ... The Heavens, Earth and Us,"** now through Feb. 21. The exhibit is sponsored by the Cincinnati Book Arts Society dedicated to providing access to education, promotion and preservation of contemporary and traditional forms of book, paper, printing and lettering arts. Gallery doors are located at the main entrance of Thomas More University's Benedictine Library.

**The Cathedral Concert Series continues its 48th Season** Feb. 23, 3 p.m., with two outstanding Cincinnati choral ensembles. Cincinnati Camerata, conducted by Ben Owen, returns to the series with Heri et Hodie/Yesterday and Today, conducted by Krista Cornish Scott. This program features early sacred music for the Church. Both groups have won acclaim for their choral skills and artistic execution of a very demanding repertoire. All Cathedral Concerts are held at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington and are open to the public with no admission charge. A freewill offering is gladly accepted. Visit [cathedralconcertseries.org](http://cathedralconcertseries.org).

**"The Psychology of Grooming - Part III"** Feb. 24, 6:30 p.m. CST (7:30 p.m. EST), in this third and final virtual presentation in the series on grooming, Mitch Mueller will talk about what grooming is, the stages of the grooming process, the mindset of offenders as they engage in grooming behaviors, and the thoughts and emotions that their victims often feel along the way. This will lead to a discussion of victim blaming. Mr. Mueller is a member of the Wisconsin Consortium of Christian Therapists and has worked throughout his career with both perpetrators and survivors of sexual violence and abuse. For information contact Paula Kaempffer, coordinator for Restorative Practices & Survivor Support for the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, at [kaempfferp@archspm.org](mailto:kaempfferp@archspm.org). Register at <https://safe-environment.archspm.org/the-psychology-of-grooming-part-iii/>.

The Office of Catechesis and Evangelization is offering an informative workshop, March 1, on the **Order of Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA) presented by Dr. William Keimig,** deputy director of the Catechetical Institute at Franciscan University. RSVP by Feb. 18, <https://covdio.org/register/>. Questions? Contact Isaak A. Isaak at [iisaak@covdio.org](mailto:iisaak@covdio.org) or (859) 392-1529.

Two upcoming **Spiritual Enrichment opportunities for teachers, catechists, and all in Church ministry.** Come to one or both. "Encountering the Person of Jesus," March 7, 8 a.m., at Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Curia Office, Covington; and "Behold Your Mother," March 8, 8 a.m., at Covington Latin School. National speaker, Deacon Gerard-Marie Anthony from the Diocese of Arlington, will present on both days. Register by Feb. 23, 2025, at <https://covdio.org/schools/>.

**Father Timothy Schehr, a retired biblical scholar and former professor at Mount St. Mary's School of Theology at the Athenaeum of Ohio, will lead the following Bible workshops:** Deuteronomy: March 8; Joshua: March 15; Judges: March 22; Ruth: May 17; and 1 & 2 Samuel: May 24. All are held 9-11:30 a.m. at Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Curia Office, Covington. Cost for each workshop is \$35. To register visit [covdio.org/bible-workshops](http://covdio.org/bible-workshops).

**BBHS Art Gallery presents, "My Very Best,"** an exhibit on works by elementary students at Sts. Peter and Paul, St. Mary, St. Joseph, and St. Philip. Show dates: March 16, 23, noon-4 p.m.; March 21 and 22, before, during and after the school play.

**All Boy Scouts, Sea Scouts, Cub Scouts, Girl Scouts, Brownies, Troops of St. George and American Heritage Girls who received their Catholic Religious Awards during 2024-2025** are invited, along with their



**A cycle of compassion**

Mary Kay Birtcil, Noah Francis and Jacob Ginder (not pictured), co-directors of the Thomas More University Compassion Pantry, collected over 200 pairs of shoes to donate to the Emergency Shelter of Northern Kentucky, Covington. The donation volume made it one of the single largest donation events in Compassion Pantry history. In an Instagram post Mr. Francis wrote, "Ultimately, our hope is to empower other individuals on our campus to participate in a cycle of compassionate community interaction, strengthening relationships and reflecting Christ's love for us every day."

troops and families, to Mass at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, March 16, 10 a.m. There will be a reception following. RSVP by March 3 at [covdio.org/scouting/](http://covdio.org/scouting/) Scouts will be presented with the Bishop's Religious Award Patch.

**The office of Catechesis and Evangelization will honor Outstanding Catechetical Leaders at the Catechetical Leadership Awards,** May 29, 6-8 p.m., Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington. Information and nomination form available at [covdio.org/catechetical-awards](http://covdio.org/catechetical-awards). Nominations due Feb. 19.

**Parents of Addicted Loved Ones, (PAL)** is a support group that meets on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays, 6:30-8 p.m. at Catholic Charities, Latonia. It provides continuing education and support, at no charge, for parents with a son, daughter or spouse suffering from addiction to alcohol or drugs. No cost. Just come — 3629 Church Street, Latonia. For more information contact Client Care at (859) 581-8974.

**Bishop Iffert and the priests of the Diocese of Covington will pray a Holy Hour** for survivors of sexual violence and for the sanctification of priests, 3 p.m., every third Thursday monthly, at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington. All are welcome.

**The Diocese of Covington, in partnership with Franciscan University's Catechetical Institute is offering FREE in-person Mentor Training Workshops.** These workshops will take place through February 2025. Register at <https://covdio.org/register/>. For information contact Isaak A. Isaak, Office of Catechesis and Evangelization, (859) 392-1529 or [iisaak@covdio.org](mailto:iisaak@covdio.org).

# Catholic Schools in Action

## Catholic Schools in Action

As the saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words, if that is the case, then what is a video worth? The achievements and communities of diocesan Catholic schools cannot be captured in a single photo — and so, this year, in collaboration with the Diocesan Schools Office, the *Messenger* invites readers to watch and learn what makes each school unique, while accomplishing a common mission — educating students in the image of Christ. Each month different schools will be highlighted — look for your school in the coming months. Scan the QR codes and discover more about this month's featured schools.



Holy Cross Elementary is a kindergarten through eighth grade school serving Holy Cross parish in the heart of historic Latonia, Kentucky. Our school was formed in 1891 and was staffed by Benedictine sisters. The Benedictine values of hospitality, community, and love of neighbors is still evident at Holy Cross today. Students grow in faith through our twice weekly masses and the receiving of sacraments in our beautiful church.



St. Augustine School, Covington, has been serving students and their families for over 100 years, as they remain committed to providing a quality Catholic education. St. Augustine School inspires students to acknowledge their potential, to awaken life's passion, and to embrace the knowledge that will lead to opportunities for a better life.



Sts. Peter and Paul School, California, is home to students PreK to eighth grade. As a Catholic community, they strive to help each child grow spiritually and academically. They are a community built on generations of families and parishioners who are dedicated to the school and parish mission. Sts. Peter and Paul School is a supportive learning place, where teachers work together and are committed to helping children succeed in their education and in life.



Founded by the Benedictine Sisters of St. Walburg Monastery, Villa Madonna Academy is a community that promotes spiritual development founded on love of God, hospitality, respect for others, service and stewardship. The Academy partners with parents to provide a student-centered learning environment that encourages students to realize their fullest potential. Villa's dedicated faculty and staff ignite a love of learning through a curriculum based upon the interdependence of all academic disciplines.

For more information about the Department of Catholic Schools, call (859) 392-1500 or e-mail [asmorey@covdio.org](mailto:asmorey@covdio.org).



# Audited financials show claims the church profits from refugee work ‘just wrong’

Kate Scanlon  
OSV News

Claims that the U.S. bishops’ conference profits from its partnership with the government to assist refugee populations that qualify for federal assistance, and that the Catholic Church facilitates illegal immigration are “just wrong,” said William Canny, the U.S. bishops’ migration director.

Canny, executive director of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Migration and Refugee Services, made the comments in an interview Jan. 30 with OSV News in the wake of remarks by Vice President JD Vance and President Donald Trump’s press secretary.

Vance, who is Catholic, questioned the motives of the U.S. bishops’ criticism of Trump’s new immigration policies in a Jan. 26 interview — including reducing restrictions on raids on churches and schools. He asked if the bishops are actually concerned about receiving federal resettlement funding and “their bottom line.”

The same week, in her debut press briefing as White House press secretary on Jan. 28, Karoline Leavitt, also a Catholic, suggested the Trump administration would seek to strip federal funds from nongovernmental organizations including Catholic Charities as part of its effort to enforce its immigration policies. In that exchange, Catholic Charities was accused of facilitating illegal immigration, claims the domestic charitable arm of the Catholic Church in the U.S. has long denied.

The USCCB website states that its Migration and Refugee Services “is the largest refugee resettlement agency in the world,” and that in partnership with its affiliates, it resettles approximately 18% of the refugees that arrive in the U.S. each year.

Audited financial statements by an outside firm show that the USCCB received about \$122.6 million in 2022 and about \$129.6 million in 2023 in funding from government agencies for refugee-related services. But the same statements show that the USCCB spent more on those services than the government gave them, meaning the conference did not profit from the grants, according to the conference’s auditors. In 2023, for example, the conference spent \$134.2 million for such services.

“We have an obligation to the federal government, when we take these grants, to report back to them, to monitor the activities that these agencies carry out. We’re talking food, housing, clothes, medical attention, et cetera, so we have an obligation to monitor that,” Canny said. “The conference does not profit from this money. And in fact, we cannot, we do not run these programs without putting also in some private funds. So there’s absolutely no profiting from these federal grants.”

The refugees eligible for the program, he added, “are highly vetted” by the U.S. government.

“When these refugees come in through this particular program, they are on a path to citizenship in this country,” Canny said. He added the program assists them with basic needs like housing, medical care and job searching.

When it comes to immigration policy, Canny said, the U.S. bishops are supportive of policies that are just, yet humane.

“Let me be clear that we believe that our country has a



OSV News photo/Amira Karaoud, Reuters

A young woman works on her homework at home in Bowling Green, Ky., Nov. 27, 2021. The Zadran family, Afghan refugees fleeing the Taliban, came to Bowling Green after a spell at a New Mexico military base.

right to control its border and a legitimate right to determine who can come in and who can’t into the country, within the bounds of justice and law,” Canny said.

He added, “The sanctity of every human life is important to the Catholic Church, the God-given dignity of each person, regardless of nationality or immigration status. So some of these executive orders that have a tendency to disregard the humanness of people” are cause for concern.

“Government authorities have the right and responsibility to promote public safety and security and to enforce just laws,” Canny said. But he pointed to denying those with “legitimate asylum claims” entry, and fewer restrictions on raids in sensitive locations like churches as particular causes for concern.

After Vance’s comments, the USCCB issued a statement defending its work with refugees.

Others weighed in more sharply, including Kim Daniels, the director of the Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life at Georgetown University, who wrote on X that arguments the U.S. bishops are “advocating for open borders” are false.

“It all comes down to an old strategy: politicians targeting Catholics for political gain,” she said.

Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan of New York, who gave prayers at both of Trump’s inaugurations, including his

second with Vance just days earlier, called the new vice president’s comments “just scurrilous” on his SiriusXM Catholic Channel show.

“I was really disappointed,” Cardinal Dolan said, calling the comments “not only harmful, this was inaccurate.” “It’s very nasty,” Cardinal Dolan added, inviting Vance to “come look at our audits.”

“You think we make money caring for the immigrants? We’re losing it hand over fist,” Cardinal Dolan said.

Cardinal Dolan praised Vance on other issues, including comments he recently delivered to the March for Life, and said he hoped the comments against the church were “uncharacteristic.”

Canny said the Catholic Church has long held its view on serving refugees, and the U.S. is a nation of immigrants. He pointed out the first American citizen to be canonized — Mother Frances Cabrini — was an immigrant.

Asked how they planned to engage with the Trump administration on immigration policy, Canny said, “Certainly as they organize and get people into place, we hope to be able to meet with them directly and discuss these matters as the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has done with every administration.”

“So we hope that that will happen to avoid misunderstandings in the future,” he said.



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# Ski park's new giant statue of Mary shows 'deep connection' to area's 'beauty, tranquility'

Jack Figge  
OSV News

Skiers at Mount Shasta Ski Park in Northern California have a new protector; a massive statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary sitting atop one of the park's three mountains. The 20-foot-tall Our Lady of Mount Shasta was unveiled this past December to much fanfare and applause at the ski park.

Located six miles from Northern California's 14,179-foot volcano, Mount Shasta, the ski area has 425 acres of skiable terrain serviced by six lifts.

In 2017, Ray and Robin Merlo purchased the ski park from the Young and Aguilera families. At the time, the Merlos also owned the family's vineyard and had a stake in a variety of other real estate holdings. With the new property came new dreams and aspirations, including placing a large statue of the blessed Virgin Mary atop one of the resort's three buttes.

When Merlo purchased the ski resort, he had two goals: build a new chairlift to Gray Butte, the park's highest point, and install a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Jim Mullins, the park's general manager, has worked at Mount Shasta since 2006. In an interview with OSV News, he shared that Merlo's ambitious plans brought life to a ski park that had shut down for two years due to a lack of snow.

"When the Merlos purchased the resort, they wanted to build a lift on Gray Butte, which everybody in the community has wanted for many, many years," Mullins said. "But then he wanted to build a statue of Mother Mary on the top of Douglas Butte because Ray loved his Catholic faith."

Tragically, Merlo died in 2020 after struggling with terminal brain cancer for over a year. Upon Ray's passing, his wife, Robin, assumed control and ownership of Mount Shasta. When Robin began leading the resort, her one priority was to fulfill her late husband's desire to build a new chairlift and construct the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

"It is the first large statue they've installed," Mullins said. "They have put some smaller ones that have been gifts from the local Catholic churches out front over the years, but this one is to honor her husband, who wished that he had completed the project, and she fulfilled it."

Building the statue, however, presented a variety of challenges. From minute supply issues to struggles with contractors, the project faced a variety of logistical issues. The greatest hurdle, however, came from a cohort of dissatisfied individuals, angered that a religious statue would adorn one of the park's three hilltops.



OSV News photo/Mt. Shasta Ski Resort

An undated photo shows a sculpture of Our Lady of Mt. Shasta and the Christ Child at the ski resort in McCloud, Calif. Sitting at 20 feet tall, the sculpture was unveiled in December 2024.

After the park announced the project, controversy ensued when a number of people launched and signed a petition demanding that the park halt construction of the statue.

"The biggest problem we had was we had some people come out and start a change.org petition protesting the construction of the statue," Mullins said. "The petition picked up national steam and a lot of people across the country began signing it, angry that we were placing a religious statue on the property."

The Dec. 10, 2023, Change.org petition argued that the statue "threatens to alienate members of our diverse community who do not share the same religious beliefs."

To date, the petition has garnered 3,328 signatures. It argued that the statue was "intrusive" and that patrons enjoyed the "natural beauty" and "spirituality" of the park and the statue would distract from that.

Mullins shared that the controversy stemmed from misinformation being spread about the project. Protesters believed that the statue was being constructed on land owned by the U.S. Forest Service that was being leased out to the ski park. However, the entire property is owned by the Merlo family, so it is private property.

"Robin owns everything. It's not leased through a Forest Service permit. So people started asking how they could build a religious statue on Forest Service property. People just did not know the facts," Mullins said.

After a plethora of bad press, Mullins began searching for ways to correct the narrative. So, he contacted Fox News, who agreed to do a story.

"I went on national news, and Fox News Business did a big story about the controversy," Mullins said.

After the segment, the ski park received positive feedback from both local residents and national supporters.

"There were so many positive comments coming in after the Fox News piece," Mullins said. "I had to show Robin the comments because she was hurt a little bit by the petition and all of the anger coming from it. But after the Fox News piece, we probably had 400-500 very positive messages towards her and very few negatives."

The 20-foot bronze statue depicts the Blessed Mother holding out the Christ Child. Positioned on top of Douglas Butte, visitors ski in front of it and can stop and walk around the statue on the heated walkways.

"This all came together wonderfully; the statue looks fantastic," Mullins said. "We hired people from the local community to do all of the work. Everybody just worked together to pull this off."

The statue is intended to reflect and complement the area's beauty and help visitors to think about the faith.

"She symbolizes a deep connection to the area's beauty and tranquility, encouraging all to embrace faith, kindness, love, and peace on earth," Robin said in a press release.

At the center of the statue stands a plaque explaining the statue's significance and the story. At the bottom lies a tribute to Ray Merlo, forever immortalizing this man's vision for the ski park: "Dedicated to my Love, Ray Merlo," it reads. "A Promise Fulfilled."

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# Pope: Like Mary, respond to God's love with action

Justin McLellan  
Catholic News Service

Christians are called to follow Mary's example by responding to God's love with action, reaching out to others instead of withdrawing from the world, Pope Francis said.

Reflecting on Mary's visit to her pregnant cousin Elizabeth after learning that she will bring the Messiah into the world, he said that "this young daughter of Israel does not choose to protect herself from the world, does not fear the dangers and judgments of others, but goes out to meet others."

The pope began his general audience in the Paul VI Audience Hall Feb. 5 by apologizing for being unable to read his catechesis due to a lingering cold, and explained that an aide, Msgr. Pierluigi Giroli, would read his prepared text.

"It is difficult for me to speak," Pope Francis said before ceding to the floor to his aide. However, he did read the summary of his catechesis in Spanish and spoke without clear signs of difficulty.

In his prepared text, the pope said that moved by love, Mary goes out to meet Elizabeth, who is "an elderly woman who welcomes, after a long wait, an unexpected pregnancy, tiring to confront at her age."

"But the Virgin also goes to Elizabeth to share faith in the God of the impossible and hope in the fulfillment of his promises," he said.



A group of children cheers while waiting for Pope Francis to arrive at the Paul VI Audience Hall for his weekly general audience at the Vatican Feb. 5, 2025.

Even after Elizabeth recognizes the significance of Mary's pregnancy, saying, "Most blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb," Mary responds by speaking "not of herself but of God and raises a praise full of faith, hope and joy," Pope Francis said.

Mary's response to Elizabeth, recited today as the

Magnificat prayer, "resounds daily in the church during the prayer of vespers," the pope noted.

The Magnificat, filled with references from the Old Testament and recalling Israel's liberation from Egypt, is "imbued with a memory of love that ignites the present with faith and illuminates the future with hope," he said.

"Mary sings the grace of the past but is the woman of the present who carries the future," Pope Francis wrote in his message.

Christians, he said, should "ask the Lord for the grace to know how to wait for the fulfillment of all his promises; and to help us welcome Mary's presence in our lives."

At the end of the audience, the pope took the microphone to ask that people remember the many countries suffering from the effects of war: "martyred Ukraine, Israel, Jordan — so many countries that are suffering there — let us remember the displaced people of Palestine, and let us pray for them."

A transcript of the pope's remarks published by the Vatican listed Palestine in the place of Jordan among the countries he referenced.

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**FEB. 12, 2025 | 7 P.M.**

KEYNOTE SPEAKER  
**GEORGE WEIGEL**  
PRESENTS  
**"POPE SAINT JOHN PAUL II AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY"**

Catholic theologian and one of America's leading public intellectuals Weigel is author of the internationally acclaimed two-volume biography of Pope St. John Paul II "Witness to Hope" (1999) and "The End and the Beginning" (2010).

**MARCH 31, 2025 | 7 P.M.**

KEYNOTE SPEAKER  
**DR. PAUL G. KENGOR**  
PRESENTS  
**"JOHN PAUL THE GREAT: SEVEN THINGS EVERY CATHOLIC SHOULD KNOW"**

Executive director for the Institute for Faith and Freedom at Grove City College (PA). Author of over 20 books, including NY Times bestsellers on Ronald Reagan and Pope John Paul II.

Religious freedom: an unalienable right

## Mental Health First Aid training

(Continued from page 3)

time where she says there was a particular spike in mental health challenges.

"We thought this was a good class to be able to provide information to people that are working in our community — so, if they come across a mental health challenge, whether professionally, at home or with a loved one, they

would have a good idea on how to respond to those situations," Ms. Ruehl said.

"A core aspect of MHFA is being fully present and listening. As human beings, we have a fundamental need to be understood," she further said, "Not necessarily agreed with, but understood. Being fully present and truly listen-

ing can help minimize feelings of distress and may be the most effective step as you help someone seek support or treatment that fosters their well-being. The vision is for MHFA to become as common as CPR and for MHFA training to be available to everyone in the United States."

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The candidate must be a Catholic in good standing with the Church, and committed to its mission. The candidate must possess excellent interpersonal skills and able to be trusted with confidential information. Practical experience with bookkeeping and a working knowledge of Microsoft Office software are among the requirements. **Qualified candidates should send their resume with a cover letter to [jlange@sthenrynk.com](mailto:jlange@sthenrynk.com).**

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Obituary

**Sister Georgia Marie Messingschlager, CDP**

Divine Providence Sister Georgia Marie Messingschlager died peacefully at Holy Family Home on Jan. 23, 2025, after a brief illness. She was a professed member of the Congregation of Divine Providence for 67 years. Born in Covington, Ky. in 1938 to William and Georgia Marie Kaub Messingschlager; she made her first profession of vows in 1958 and professed her final vows in 1963.

Sister Georgia Marie began her ministry of teaching in 1958 at St. Ann Elementary School in West Covington. In 1966 she was transferred to Our Lady of Providence Academy and it was there she began a long tenure as a high school teacher of Latin and history. After 11 years at OLP, an all-girls



**Sister Georgia Marie Messingschlager, CDP**

academy, she went to Covington Catholic High School, an all-boys school and was affectionately called “the nun,” being the only sister there. After six years, she left CCH in 1983 and became the first woman religious invited to teach at St. Xavier High School, Cincinnati until she left in 2014.

She continued as a high school substitute teacher and volunteered at St. Bernard Food Pantry in Dayton, Ky. In 2018 she began a ministry of visiting and telephoning the elderly at St. Matthew’s Parish in Kenton, Ky.

Over the years, whether working with students collecting food and clothing for the

needy or supervising annual student trips to Indian reservations in the west, her compassion and care for others was a hallmark. She was an avid gardener of vegetables, always creating a space in the yard for planting and cultivating which she also prepared and canned as gifts for others. Her jellies and jams were special. Sister Georgia never knew a stranger and her smile and interest in others created many long-lasting relationships among former students and faculty and volunteers.

She will be missed by her religious community, the Sisters of Divine Providence; her sisters, Sister Marie Rose Messingschlager, CDP and Betty Hummel and husband Tom Hummel; her brother Rick and wife Marian Messingschlager and her many nieces and nephews. Her brother, Don preceded her in death.

Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated at St. Cecilia Church, Independence, Jan. 29, and burial took place the following day in the convent cemetery. Memorials suggested to the Congregation of Divine Providence, 5300 Saint Anne Drive, Melbourne, KY 41059.

## New report gives insights into men and women religious making perpetual vows today

Gina Christian  
OSV News

Those who embrace consecrated life “bring the hope of the Gospel to the world in both visible and hidden ways,” said Bishop Earl A. Boyea of Lansing, Michigan, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations.

Bishop Boyea shared his thoughts in a Jan. 29 statement released by the USCCB ahead of the World Day of Prayer for Consecrated Life on Feb. 2, the feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple. The day of prayer for women and men in consecrated life was instituted by St. John Paul II in 1997.

Along with Bishop Boyea’s statement, the USCCB also announced the release of a new report on men and women religious in the U.S. who professed their perpetual vows in 2024.

The annual survey is conducted for the bishops by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University.

With responses from 75% of the U.S.-based institutes contacted by CARA, a total of 140 religious members — 73 sisters and nuns, and 67 brothers and priests — participated in the survey. It represents a response rate of 72% out of the 194 identified men and women religious in the profession class of 2024.

The CARA data shows that a majority of responding religious orders — 81% — had no one profess perpetual vows in 2024.

According to CARA’s report, 91 women and 103 men professed perpetual vows in religious life in 2024, with an average age of 37. Their ages ranged from 25 to 69. Half of the respondents were aged 34 or younger.

Candidates who do seek consecrated religious life are ardent in faith, explained Father Jorge Torres, a priest of the Diocese of Orlando, Florida, and executive director of the USCCB’s Secretariat of Clergy, Consecrated Life And Vocations.

“There are so many young people who are saying yes. They are attracted to those communities that are challenging them to live the Gospel in its fullness, and that’s one thing that sometimes people may not see,” Father Torres told OSV News. “Do we have the numbers that we had some



CNS photo/Vatican Media

**Pope Francis watches as members of religious orders light candles at the beginning of vespers on the eve of the feast of the Presentation of the Lord, also known as Candlemas, and the World Day for Consecrated Life Feb. 1, 2025, in St. Peter’s Basilica at the Vatican.**

generations ago? We don’t, but we have great quality.”

That quality includes a range of educational and life experiences prior to entrance into religious life. CARA’s report on the 2024 profession class found that while on average respondents were 19 years old when they first considered religious life, almost three quarters — 73% — had earned an undergraduate or graduate degree before entering their religious institute.

“I have multiple art degrees and came back to the faith at one of the most secular art institutes in the country. God is everywhere,” said Sister Mary Michael Di Palma, a member of the Sister Servants of the Eternal Word, in a statement posted to the USCCB’s online profile of members from the 2024 profession class.

Trappist Sister Jennifer Illig said in her USCCB profile that she had first visited the community in 2003, but entered nine years later after earning her doctorate in theology.

At the same time, only 11% reported having their entrance to religious life delayed (generally by about three years) due to educational debt. On average, this group spent three years paying off more than \$46,000 in educational debt. Family and friends were the most common form of

assistance.

The CARA report also noted 82% of the respondents had prior work experience, largely in the fields of business, education and health care.

Augustinian Brother David Relstab of the Province of Our Mother of Good Counsel said in his USCCB profile that he had been a mechanic for Mercedes-Benz (a job that requires mastery of complex electronic systems), and still teaches automotive technology at a local community college.

Most (84%) respondents said they had received encouragement from someone to consider religious life, generally a religious sister or brother (59%), friend (59%) or parish priest (38%). Over half (57%) also reported being discouraged from the prospect, with women (61%) more likely than men (43%) to experience such push-back.

Well over three quarters (78%) had participated in a “come and see” vocational discernment experience.

Regarding their habits of prayer before consecrated life, CARA found going on retreat was “the most common type of formative prayer experience” for four out of five. A similar number prayed the rosary regularly before joining their religious institute. And seven out of 10 went regularly to Eucharistic adoration.

The CARA report also found:

— The majority of respondents (92%) have been Catholic since baptism shortly after birth, with 92% having at least one parent who was Catholic, while for 87% both parents were Catholic;

— Almost all (97%) respondents were raised during their formative years by their biological parents, with 90% raised by a married couple living together, with 96% also having at least one sibling;

— Over half (64%) of the respondents listed their primary race or ethnicity as Caucasian, European American, or white, with 14% identifying as Asian, Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian; 11% as Hispanic or Latino; 6% as African, African American or Black; 5% as mixed race or other;

— Slightly less than three quarters (69%) of respondents were born in the U.S. with 12% born in Asia, 10% in Latin America and 6% in Africa.

In his statement, Bishop Boyea said that women and men in consecrated life “remind us of the deep desire of the human heart to see the face of God.”

He added, “We thank them for their dedication ‘to stay awake, to be vigilant, to persevere in waiting’ as Pope Francis has said.”

### Protecting God's Children for Adults Safe Environment Trainings

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check, VIRTUS session and Acceptance Form are posted on your account. You will receive 12 bulletins per year. You will receive e-mail notices at [system@pub.virtus.org](mailto:system@pub.virtus.org) unless your computer program blocks them.

**Bulletins:**

■ February bulletin: posted Sunday, Feb. 2; due Tuesday, March 4.

The monthly e-mail reminder of a new bulletin posted will come from [system@pub.virtus.org](mailto:system@pub.virtus.org).

**[www.virtusonline.org](http://www.virtusonline.org), enter your user id and password.** If your account is suspended contact your primary location where you volunteer or are employed. Your primary location contact information is found under your Contact Tab.

**VIRTUS Training:**

■ Thursday, February 13, 9–11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

■ Thursday, February 13, 6–8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

■ Wednesday, February 26, 9–11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

■ Wednesday, February 26, 6–8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

■ Tuesday, March 4, 6:30–9 p.m., the Diocesan Catholic Children's Home, Training room, Miller Building, Ft. Mitchell

■ Tuesday, March 5, 6:30–9 p.m., Diocesan Catholic Children's Home, Training room, Miller Building, Ft. Mitchell

■ Tuesday, March 11, 9–11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

■ Tuesday, March 11, 6–8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

■ Wednesday, March 26, 9–11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

■ Wednesday, March 26, 6–8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

■ Thursday, April 10, 9–11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

■ Thursday, April 10, 6–8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

■ Tuesday, April 29, 9–11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

■ Tuesday, April 29, 6–8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

■ Wednesday, May 7, 9–11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

■ Wednesday, May 7, 6–8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

**Note: If your Training Tab is missing** or you cannot access your account, contact your parish, school or institution. For other difficulties, contact Marylu Steffen at (859) 392-1500 or [msteffen@covdio.org](mailto:msteffen@covdio.org)

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National/World

**Nothing is worth sacrificing the life of a child, pope tells world leaders**

VATICAN CITY — It is unacceptable that a child’s right to life and a dignified childhood should be sacrificed to “the idols” of power, profit, ideology and nationalistic self-interest, Pope Francis told a group of world experts and leaders. “A childhood denied is a silent scream condemning the wrongness of the economic system, the criminal nature of wars, the lack of adequate medical care and schooling,” he said in his address opening a Feb. 3 summit at the Vatican on children’s rights. “We are here today to say that we do not want this to become the new normal,” he said, and “we are all here together, to put children, their rights, their dreams and their demand for a future at the center of our concern.” About 50 guests from all over the world, including former U.S. Vice President Al Gore, attended the one-day world leaders’ summit titled, “Love them and protect them.” The invitees included Nobel Prize winners, government ministers and heads of state, leaders of international and nonprofit organizations, top Vatican officials and other experts. “I am confident that, by pooling your experience and expertise, you can open new avenues to assist and protect the children whose rights are daily trampled upon and ignored,” he said.

**For Ukrainians ‘on brink of endurance,’ gestures of solidarity bring hope**

ZAPORIZHZHIA, Ukraine — As Ukraine faces a third anniversary of Russia’s full-scale invasion on Feb. 24, 2022, hope among the people is waning due to ongoing attacks, including a barrage of Russian rockets over the weekend. Despite the challenges, Auxiliary Bishop Jan Sobilo of Kharkiv-Zaporizhzhia said gestures from Pope Francis and prospects for peace under the new U.S. administration offer a glimmer of hope. Nighttime strikes on cities like Sumy, Odesa and Poltava caused significant casualties and damage Jan. 30-Feb. 2. Bishops Sobilo emphasized the importance of solidarity and Vatican support, particularly Pope Francis’ continuous outreach, including an online meeting with Ukrainian youth Feb. 1. The bishop also noted the optimism sparked by U.S. President Donald Trump’s mentioning of peace talks, though he stressed the importance of fair conditions of such talk. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy told The Associated Press Feb. 1 that talks between the U.S. and Russia about the war in Ukraine without his country at the negotiation table would be “very dangerous.” Despite the immense suffering, Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, papal almoner who has traveled to Ukraine nine times, highlighted the resilience and hope of the Ukrainian people.

**Ceasefire overshadows Gaza’s humanitarian crisis**

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip — A fragile ceasefire between Israel and Hamas has paused air raids and bombings on Gaza, but the humanitarian crisis continues to worsen. Joseph Hazboun, regional director of the Catholic Near East Welfare Association, describes the situation as bleak, with over 17,000 children orphaned and at least 150,000 pregnant women in urgent need of health care. Mental health issues are widespread, with 1 million children requiring psychological support. CNEWA is providing essential relief, including food, medical care and psychosocial programs. However, the region’s challenges persist, including limited access due to road closures and ongoing reconstruction needs. Hazboun also highlights the diminishing Christian population, now down to about 600, with only 300 expected to remain after the Rafah crossing reopened Feb. 1 — so far for medical assistance border crossing for those wounded. While the ceasefire offers temporary relief, Hazboun and other experts warn that lasting peace remains uncertain, with deep-rooted issues between Israelis and Palestinians unresolved.

**Illinois state lawmakers file bills to legalize physician assisted-suicide**

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. — Illinois lawmakers have introduced bills in the state House and Senate to legalize physician-assisted suicide, potentially making it the 12th U.S. jurisdiction to do so. The proposed “End-of-Life Options for Terminally Ill Patients Act” requires two doctors to confirm a patient has six months or less to live and to assess their mental state, before authorizing the patient to take a lethal drug. The law would not classify such deaths as suicide or homicide, and specify the official cause of death be the patient’s original illness. The Catholic Conference of Illinois is strongly opposing the bill, advocating the state fund and expand palliative care instead. The conference is trying to help lawmakers understand the law risks “suicide contagion.” Supporters of legalizing physician-assisted suicide, like Sen. Linda Holmes, D-Aurora, the bill’s main sponsor in the Senate, have argued it offers an alternative to dying in extreme suffering and cited polls showing strong public support. However, opponents have warned that when states or countries enact assisted suicide laws, they almost always expand them and relax the initial criteria to cover a greater number of people.

**New NY law seen as big step in ‘rooting out exploitation’ in fashion industry**

NEW YORK — New York’s fashion models — as some of the most visible faces of a \$2.5 trillion global business — have long worked without the benefit of basic labor protections. But that’s going to change when the Fashion Workers Act, signed into law Dec. 21 by New York Gov. Kathy Hochul, takes effect in June. It will afford models a host of employment safeguards in an industry where many say they have previously felt mute and isolated. The new law “represents a significant step for-

ward in rooting out exploitation in a field where the workers have been subject to rampant abuse over the years,” said Joseph McCartin, a labor historian and the executive director of Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor at Jesuit-run Georgetown University in Washington. Sara Ziff, executive director of the Model Alliance, said Dec. 22 that under the law model management companies in New York will be registered with the state — “which will protect aspiring models from fraudulent predators” — and these companies will legally be required “to act in the best interests of the people they represent.” Model Alliance, founded in 2012, has pushed for labor rights in the fashion industry for almost a decade.

**Congolese bishop deplores escalation of violence as city of Goma claimed by rebels**

GOMA, Congo — As violence escalated in Goma Jan. 27, Bishop Willy Ngumbi Ngegele expressed solidarity with the people, assuring them of the church’s support. Rebels from the M23 movement, allegedly backed by Rwanda, have advanced on the city, causing widespread destruction and displacing tens of thousands. The bishop, who heads the Diocese of Goma, condemned the bombing of a maternity hospital, in which newborns died, and looting by both civilians and military personnel, urging respect for human life and basic services. Goma, a city of over 2 million, is a crucial humanitarian hub and gateway to mining regions. Fierce fighting between rebels and the Congolese army has already killed at least 25 people. Georgette Kahongya, a local Catholic, described the dire situation, with many lacking food and water and fearing for their lives. Christian organization World Vision reported that around 400,000 people have fled the violence, and key roads and the airport in Goma are now blocked. African leaders, including Kenya’s President William Ruto, are working to bring about peace talks to end the violence.

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 600 Farrell Drive, Covington, KY 41011



# DIOCESE of COVINGTON **IN-PERSON** ADULT CATHOLIC FAITH FORMATION WORKSHOPS



JUNE 9 – 13, 2025, AT THOMAS MORE UNIVERSITY

The Diocese of Covington, in partnership with the Franciscan University's Catechetical Institute, is offering FREE In-Person Adult Faith Formation Workshops at TMU's new Academic Activity Center.

Most workshops are broken into two parts and scheduled for two consecutive days, 1.5 hours per day. Instructors will provide topical information, video content, and open discussion time.

The workshops are for anyone entrusted with the formation of others, whether professional or volunteer, from households to diocesan employees, Parish and School Leaders, Catechists, Teachers, DREs/CREs, Youth and Young Adult Ministers, Family Life Ministers, Homeschoolers, OCIA Directors/Coordinators, Bible Study/Rosary Groups, Retreat Teams, Coaches, Individuals, Parents and Grandparents.

Ongoing Adult Faith Formation is the First Priority of the Diocesan Pastoral Plan. We invite everyone to sign up for a FREE ACCOUNT under their Parish or School and encourage you to explore the Catechetical Institute's 200+ workshops at <https://franciscanathome.com>.



For more information and to register, visit <https://covdio.org/register>. For questions, please contact Isaak Abraham Isaak at 859-392-1529 or [iisaak@covdio.org](mailto:iisaak@covdio.org).

- The Vocation of the Catechist
- The Mission of the Catholic School & the Role of Teachers
- Jesus: The Christo-centricity of Catechesis
- The Deposit of Faith: An Intro to the Catechism
- Essential Link Between Liturgy & Catechesis
- Scripture: The Heart of Catechesis
- Sacred Scripture: The Big Picture
- The Trinity
- Christ: His Person & Works
- The Sacramental Economy
- Praying Scripture: Lectio Divina
- Evangelizacion en la Parroquia
- Unlocking the Rich Treasure of the Catechism
- The Catechumenal Process: A Modern Restoration
- Entrance into Christ & Participation in God's Life
- Family Systems in a Catholic School
- The Evangelizing Classroom
- Dilexit Nos: Formation of Heart as Link Between Evangelization & Catechesis
- Child Catechetical Methodologies & Learning Styles
- Adult Catechetical Methodologies & Learning Styles
- Pedagogy of Revelation & the Response of Faith
- Prayer: Introduction to the Spiritual Life of the Catechist
- A Foundational Vision: Theology of the Body
- A Vision for Effective Youth Ministry
- Methods & Practical Skills for Youth Ministry